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AUTHOR Pagels, Carrie F.
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ABSTRACT

College personnel from a Special Services Program explain how parents, students, and school psychologists can best prepare high school seniors with disabilities for the transition to college. The difference between accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act versus Public Law 94-142 is highlighted with an emphasis on those needs which can be met in the college environment. Tips for preparation in the senior year of high school are given as well as guidelines for paperwork which will be needed by the receiving institution. Boards of Regents policies for the state of Georgia are used as an example of evaluation formats that might be expected at the college level. Some of the controversies in college accommodations are addressed (e.g., meeting course objectives) when a student is not able to take a course because all reasonable accommodations would still not enable them to meet these. (Author)

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Transitioning High School Students with Learning Disabilities to the College Environment: Avoiding Common Pitfalls

Presenters:

Carrie Fancett Pagels, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Psychology Guidance, and Counseling Department; Learning Disabilities Diagnostician, Special Services Program

Maggie J. Viverette, M.A., Assistant Professor, Special Education Department, Coordinator, Special Services Program

Kimberley Godden, M.S., Assistant Professor, Academic Affairs; Assistant Coordinator, Special Services Program

VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY

1500 PATTERSON STREET

VALDOSTA, GA 31698

(912) 245-2498

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Article written by: Carrie F. Pagels, Ph.D.

16 Allison Rd., Newport News, VA. 23602-6702 (757) 833-3653

Abstract

College personnel from a Special Services Program explain how parents, students, and school psychologists can best prepare high school seniors with disabilities for the transition to college. The difference between accommodations under the ADA vs. PL 94-142 will be highlighted with an emphasis on those needs which can be met in the college environment. Tips for preparation in the senior year of high school are given as well as guidelines for paperwork which will be needed by the receiving institution. Board of Regents policies for the state of Georgia will be used as an example of evaluation

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formats which might be expected at the college level. Some of the controversies in college accommodations will be addressed, e.g., meeting course objectives - when a student is not able to take a course because all reasonable accommodations would still not enable them to meet these.

Introduction

With ADA and with College level Special Services Programs the number of students with disabilities who are attending college has sky-rocketed. Legal cases have upheld the need for these services, e.g., Boston University case. Students are now coming into college from special education program in high school and are expecting to receive services. With the revision of the IDEA, students are coming into college without a current evaluation. A major difference between IDEA/ADA is where the responsibility lies in offering accommodations. Students in secondary education must initiate the need for services. Those who were served in the public schools by identification by the school district may be surprised in college when they are not automatically "offered" services when they show up. Students are often confused, thinking that since they sent their special education records on to the university that they will be served.

The purpose of this presentation is to inform students, parents, and school psychologists of some of the differences between accommodations received in high school compared to that which is available at the college level. While school psychologists in the public school may consider not giving a three year re-evaluation to senior student (with a learning disability) enrolled in resource class, because the student has already been evaluated multiple times, this may be problematic for the student. If s/he goes on to college the following fall, she/he will likely find that their now four-year-old evaluation is not acceptable as proof of their disability, by their university Special Services Office. The general guideline for age of psychologicals is within three years of their entrance into the institution. Universities are not required to have school psychologists on their staff to do evaluations for students who have outdated reports. The students and their families may have to seek an evaluation either through the Psychology Department, if there is a graduate program, or through a private psychologist.

Definitions

ADA = Americans with Disabilities Act. ADA/Section 504. The Americans with Disabilities Act made it illegal to discriminate against persons based upon a disability. It called for accommodations to be made for a person to perform in their duties.

IDEA = Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (now under revision).

PL 94-142 (Public Law 94-142), This earlier law mandate that education be offered to all school-aged children. Both special education and gifted education programs grew under this law. The IDEA followed and has subsequently been revised.

"Disability" at the college level - Determined by state and federal guidelines. Student with a disability = this is undergoing scrutiny with several legal cases, e.g., Boston University case.

ADHD = Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

LD = Learning Disability

OHI = Other Health Impaired

PI/PD = Psychiatrically Impaired, Psychological Disorder

Accommodations = legal term in comparison with recommendations. This is different than IEP planning. For example, at the college level, Recommendations = suggestions.

RCLD/BOR = Regents Center for Learning Disorders/Board of Regents.

Disability Services may go by different names, depending upon the institution, e.g., at V.S.U. it is called the Special Services Program. These offices came into existence due to legal mandates under the Americans with Disabilities Act. However, may programs did not actually get started until their particular university system was sued for failing to accommodate students with disabilities.

Creating a Transition Team for High School to College

Special Service Programs in universities are fairly new entities in most higher education institutions. They are different than special education services, e.g., P.L. 94-142 vs. ADA. Transition teams in high school have been mandated, but seem to focus more on the severely disabled students transition to vocation rather than college. An increase in communication between high school and college transition teams is needed.

Each person involved with the student with a disability has a unique impact on the success of the transition. Members may include: parents, teachers, the student, administrators, coaches, as well as school psychologists. Guidance counselors may need to steer students in special education programs toward colleges with excellent Special Services Programs, in addition to meeting their academic needs.

School psychologists at the college level need to work with the secondary level school psychologists to have evaluations complete prior to attending college. High School Evaluations typically include only I.Q., achievement, social-emotional screening, possibly one other measure, e.g., Bender. College evaluations tend to be much more extensive. It is incumbent upon the college-applicant with a learning disability to follow through on requirements, however, as differentiated from high school transition team responsibilities.

Choosing a College

What things should a student consider?

What size school? If the student knows that a large lecture format is overwhelming or extremely distracting, then a smaller university may need to be considered.

What environment? If the college student is highly distractible and there is little opportunity for quiet studying but many opportunities to be distracted by parties and entertainment, then parents and students should reconsider this as a choice. As an example, was the school selected as one of the top "Party Schools of the USA" by a national magazine? This would not be a good choice for a student with ADHD.

Location? Does the student still need the support of the parents? Are there other relative or family friends in the area to provide support. Is the area so isolated that a student could not find off-campus tutoring if it became necessary?

What type/level of services are available? Are you in a state where technology is being financially supported? This may be important because the more money flowing into an institution likely will translate to more computer labs, up-to-date software, and more general technology which in turn will make it easier for a student with a disability to be accommodated with new technology.

What are admissions requirements? Provisional admits? Some students believe that they will be given alternative criteria for qualifying for entrance. This may not be so. For example, at VSU, all students must meet the entrance criteria. Everyone, regardless of an identified disability must take College Placement Exams if they do no meet the criteria. They would then be accepted on a provisional basis until they have proved themselves capable of performing in the college environment. Those with disabilities could then seek accommodations.

What degrees are offered? "Goodness of Fit." A number of students come into a university because they have heard that the special services available there were good. However, if their degree objective is not offered, then they will ultimately have to transfer.

What are the requirements of your degree program? For example, is a foreign language required? This may be an important issues for a student with language difficulties but who is not so impaired that they would qualify for a substitution of the foreign language requirement.

Are additional services available, e.g., Counseling?

Is there a social group on campus specifically for students with disabilities?

Pitfalls to Avoid

Differences in Right to Privacy Laws. Under FERPA, students must give consent for any of their information to be given to their parents. Thus, although the parent may be the one initiating the referral,

the student must consent to have the parent know anything about their involvement in a Special Services office.

Level of support specific to the disability, e.g., some institutions may have a group RFB&D membership. This may be advantageous to a person who does not want to register and pay for their own membership, or who may want to "try out" this service before registering. Different services may be available dependent upon the "typical" college disability population served, i.e., a certain institution may be more geared towards accommodating certain types of disabilities. This may affect what is "typically" offered. It could also affect the adaptive technology that is available on that campus. The SSP offices serves as a liaison between students and faculty and to ancillary services

Lack of self-advocacy skills. Although high school transition teams try to involve students with their I.E.P.'s, reevaluations, etc., many first year college students have no idea what their disability is or how it affects them. Some will not come to SSP because they do not want their peers to know about their disability. Some students may not seek help until they have failed an important benchmark in their college education, e.g., Regents exams.

Level of knowledge regarding related laws. Only rarely have students been aware that accommodations in the college environment must all be initiated by the student. Self-disclosure is voluntary. Some students even believe that they will be receiving special education classes in college(!).

College Evaluations

The evaluation must follow the format set out by that state's Board of Regents or other university governing body. In the state of Georgia, for example, the student must have a processing deficit which is documented. Georgia requires cognitive processing assessment that is linked to academic deficiencies. The intelligence score must be above 90 for the overall score. All areas of processing must also be addressed in the report, i.e., visual-spatial, visual-motor, executive functions, language, auditory, memory, and attention, particularly as associated with a specific area of deficit in achievement.

ADHD is differentiated from LD but some accommodations can be given to students with ADHD that are given to students with learning disabilities, e.g., calculator. Achievement tests at this level are somewhat sparse. The ***Scholastic Abilities Test for Adults (SATA)*** is an instrument specifically designed to measure adult aptitude and achievement and a general measure of scholastic accomplishment. This measure was discussed. Evaluations must have been done within three years. Individual states may have Boards of Regents which set guidelines, e.g., University System of Georgia site at:

http://www.usg.edu/admin/accaff/handbook/

Documentation

Previous psychologicals need to be reviewed by the psychologist and/or committee. State guidelines would need to be followed. Many students do not have a copy of the psychological. Parents often bring in I.E.P.'s. At transition team meetings, a report should be given to the student/parents to keep in their files. If the state mandates only a seven year record retention policy, for example, and the student attends college after that time then she or he may not be able to get copies of their records and another evaluation would have to be done.

Medical documentation needs to consist of something more than a sentence written on a physician's prescription pad. The state of Georgia has guidelines which are listed on the internet. ADHD guidelines are fairly stringent and are consistent with NASP's policy statement on ADHD.

Summary

College evaluation requirements are quite rigorous in some states. The three year evaluation rule has been upheld in court. There has been a failure to prepare the student with a disability for college life. Students need to choose a college in which the level of support they need can be obtainted. Parents, students, high school and higher education personnel all need to work together to facilitate the transition of a learning disabled student to college.

References

Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD): (614)488-4972 (voice/tty) internet: ahead@postbox.acs.ohio-state.edu

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